

Doubtfire a sure bet; Nutcracker a ballet feast

By Gerri Pare
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — A divorcing dad determined to see his children every day transforms himself into their new housekeeper, the motherly Mrs. Doubtfire (20th Century Fox).

Fed up with the juvenile behavior of her unemployed actor husband (Robin Williams), busy working wife Miranda (Sally Field) begins divorce proceedings.

The court limits doting dad to stingy once-a-week visits with his three adored children (Lisa Jakub, Matthew Lawrence and Mara Wilson) so dad finds a solution when mom advertises for a housekeeper.

Sporting a lilting Scottish accent and unrecognizable under full body padding, grey wig, thick glasses and pancake makeup, he fools them all as the gentle 60-year-old Mrs. Doubtfire and soon becomes his wife's confidante in matters romantic. He is trying to discourage her interest in an old flame (Pierce Brosnan) while also secretly pursuing a solid TV job hosting a children's show.

Unfortunately for him, the job interview with his prospective boss (Robert Prosky) is over dinner in a restaurant where he is also gussied up as Mrs. Doubtfire, celebrating his wife's birthday.

Williams is the whole show in director Chris Columbus' sweetly appealing one-joke comedy. Williams' zany character perfectly showcases his lightning-fast comedic talents. He also brings to life a genuinely caring father who has no intention of lessening his parental in-



Sally Field stars as Miranda Hillard in Mrs. Doubtfire.

volvement because of impending divorce. If anything, he wants to be there more for his kids as they go through a painful period. His closeness with his children comes through brightly even when some of the comedy situations look dimwitted and overly derivative of *Tootsie* and *Risky Business*.

Some scenes, however, are hilarious as when court-appointed supervisor Anne Haney visits dad's new apartment and finds Mrs. Doubtfire instead.

The movie sidesteps a conventional happy ending, leaving it uncertain whether mom and dad will ever make up, but Mrs. Doubtfire delivers a gentle message for the many children of divorce not to forget that they are still loved, even if their parents no longer love each other. This comes off a tad preachy but it's in keeping with a character whose values are firmly centered on his family — a refreshing contrast to the usual aloof image of divorced dads.

As broad-based gender-bender humor, there is no doubt Mrs. Doubtfire will catch fire at the box office.

Due to frequent though mild sexual innuendo, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

'The Nutcracker'

A beloved ballet in the Christmas tradition is now available to the mass audience with Warner Bros.' release of *The Nutcracker*.

The slim story is only window dressing for the glorious music of Tchaikovsky, wedded to George Balanchine's choreography and performed by the New York City Ballet.



(Left to right) Lisa Jakub, Mara Wilson, Robin Williams and Matthew Lawrence star in Mrs. Doubtfire.

Kevin Kline's minimal, hushed narration opens on a 19th-century Christmas Eve home where young Marie (Jessica Lynn Cohen) has been given a toy soldier nutcracker by godfather Drosselmeier (Bart Robinson Cook). The excited children and their parents dance joyously before Marie falls into a deep, dream-filled sleep.

Dreaming her godfather's nephew (Macaulay Culkin) comes to life as the nutcracker, he rescues her from a fearsome seven-headed mouse (Robert Lyon) and transports her to the enchanted Land of Sweets, where delightful

confections of every concoction perform for them.

Ballet fans are in for a treat, but small children with short attention spans — and action-oriented adults — may be less charmed by the late director Emile Ardolino's straightforward filming of the staged ballet.

In addition to the fairly static camera work, the editing is noticeably abrupt in spots and young Culkin is wooden as the toy soldier-prince, his smiles often looking more like resentful smirks.

There is no taking away from the music and dance, however. The beautifully familiar strains of Tchaikovsky are enhanced by exquisite performances of Darci Kistler as the Sugarplum Fairy, Damian Woetzel as her Cavalier, Kyra Nichols as Dewdrop, and Wendy Whelan as the exotically acrobatic Coffee, to name only a few of the principal dancers.

Just as delightful are a magical Christmas tree that grows to stupefying heights and ensemble scenes of pint-sized angels in ivory and gold, and the dance of the snowflakes in all their shimmering, translucent beauty.

Based on *The Nutcracker* tale by E.T.A. Hoffman, the production is staged by Master-in-Chief Peter Martins of the New York City Ballet with its orchestra under the direction of David Zinman. With no dialogue to distract, the lovely sets by the late Rouben Ter-Arutunian and jewel-like costumes by Karinska truly stand out.

It is a classic ballet, and if the pacing seems too stately at times, it is still 96 minutes well-spent, and could serve as a delightful introduction to ballet for youngsters.

The USCC classification is A-II — general patronage. The MPAA rating is G — general audiences.

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